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## Fourth Sunday in Ordinary Time - 28 January 2024

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# 28 January 2024

## Fourth Sunday in Ordinary Time

Reflection by Gerard Moore

### Introduction

The opening chapters in the Gospel of Mark establish Jesus as a prophet who brings the presence of the divine to the lives of the people. He is not one of the pack of leaders who have power but no authority. Rather he touches the people in their need, is recognised as having authority, and takes what is unclean from their midst. There is a challenge for us in this!

### Penitential Act

Use one of the *Roman Missal* texts or this optional litany form:

Lord Jesus, you came to fulfil the Law. Lord have mercy.

You came to show us the way to the Father. Christ have mercy.

You came to lead us with authority. Lord have mercy.

### Collect

*The oration*

Grant us, Lord our God,  
that we may honour you with all our mind,  
and love everyone in truth of heart.  
Through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son,  
who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit,  
God, for ever and ever.

The Fourth Sunday in Ordinary Time has us praying one of the most interesting collects in the entire missal. It also defies translators' attempts to capture the original intention of the text and the audacity of its execution. The oration is a play on the Gospel imperative to love God and neighbour and retains most of the vocabulary in its Vulgate Latin translation. Yet this clear reference is deliberately transformed into a prayer that petitions for us to 'honour' God with all our heart, soul and mind, and love all human beings with the warming love of the Holy Spirit.

The oration is from the pen of Gelasius I and was first prayed in the papal mass of Sunday January 29, 495. The pope was leading the people to reject the celebration of the ancient and traditional Roman pagan festival of Lupercalia. The festivities

were marked by seduction, drunkenness and defamation. Hence the admonition to love all with true Christian love. The petition to honour, with a strong sense of worship, well reflects the need to assert that the only source of grace is Christ. Authentic love of God requires true worship. And the reference to love that is 'true of heart' is a subtle reminder, lost in any translation, that the new Rome is founded on Peter and Paul who have displaced the mythical twins Romulus and Remus.

In effect the prayer teaches the key to inculturation: every action must be judged by its compatibility with authentic worship and by the unboundedness of its love. All commandments follow from this.

### **Acknowledgement**

The discussion of the collect, slightly adapted, was composed by Gerard Moore for the Canadian liturgical journal *Celebrate!* (Novalis Press). Our thanks to them for permission to reuse the material.

## **First Reading**

### **Deuteronomy 18:15–20**

God continues to raise prophets from among the people who can speak the divine word into the people.

## **Responsorial Psalm**

### **Psalm 94:1-2, 6-9. R. v. 9**

*If today you hear his voice harden not your hearts.*

Psalm 94(95) is a call to worship and obedience to the Lord. We need to come before God with an open heart and be willing to listen and not be hard of heart.

## **Second Reading**

### **1 Corinthians 7:32–35**

Paul encourages unfettered devotion to the mission of Jesus.

## **Gospel Reading**

### **Mark 1:21–28**

The people come to recognise Jesus as a prophet in their midst.

## **Reflection**

The author of the Gospel of Mark sets Jesus as different from all others. He is not like the scribes. He is not like the leaders who speak without authority. He has power over spirits. He does not seek fame. Yet the evangelist is not setting Jesus apart from us. Like his people he attends the synagogue. There he teaches at the level of

the people, who understand his message. His authority is in the power of his words to touch the listeners, and to bring God closer to them. Both the people and the bad spirits recognise this, though the unclean spirits are less than impressed! How are they to understand this man, a local from Galilee, who is now amongst them?

Our first reading from Deuteronomy is of significant help in this task. There Moses is reminding the people that God brings among them prophets and the divine word. The prophets are from their own kin. They may be somewhat 'apart' from the people, but they are from them and belong in their midst. However, they are not self-made, nor chosen by the people. Prophets are called by God for the purposes of God under the wisdom of God. This is not a predictable trajectory.

The prophets speak in the name of God. This is a theology of 'name' that we are not overly familiar with. In the biblical cultures, the name of God signified the presence of God. To speak in the name of God was to carry something of the presence of God amidst the people. Perhaps closest in our mindset is the concept of sacrament. To meet and hear someone who spoke in the name of God was to encounter the divine. You can see here why a false prophet is to be condemned.

Moses was considered the greatest of the prophets. Raised amongst the elite, he was a bumbling leader with a bad temper and a speech impediment. Yet, speaking within the word of God he was a great leader, who forged a people in the furnace of the desert and brought them to the land of promise. His was not a predictable trajectory.

In our Gospel passage, Mark is establishing Jesus as a prophet. He speaks the word of God, he has authority, and he overcomes evil spirits. As the Gospel progresses Jesus will fulfill and surpass the category of prophet and be understood as the very embodiment of the word of God.

Hearing the two passages from Deuteronomy and the Gospel we are tempted to align ourselves with the hearers. There is some merit in this. However, in the Eucharist we are the prophetic community transformed in Christ and sent out to transform our world. We are Moses, we are the presence of Jesus to our world. We are called by God to speak the divine word and to cast out the unclean spirits! The challenge is whether we merit, in our words and deeds, the 'fame' of Jesus. The word spread about him because he touched people, offered them hope, called out that which disturbed the community, all of which constituted his 'authority'. Our Gospel is an invitation for us to be the presence of Jesus in our town and place.

And also, a word about Paul! This is a lovely reading in many ways, especially from an itinerant preacher who is unmarried and fully devoted to his work and his way. It is not quite clear he understands marriage, though the focus of the couple is on their love. The focus on the not yet married can be on the Lord. Given his own experience and the power of his ministry this is fair enough. Perhaps the approach needs to be tempered by the understanding that the love of a couple is missionary and outgoing too, and unselfishly so. It is an understanding Paul comes to in his other writings.

# Prayer of the Faithful

## Introduction

The psalmist calls us to not harden our hearts, so with faith in God's goodness we offer all our needs and the needs of the world.

## Petitions

We pray for Pope Francis and the leaders of our Church. May they walk as prophets among us and help us to hear the word of God and be effective in our response.

*(Pause)* Lord hear us OR We pray to the Lord.

We pray for the leaders of the world. May they work tirelessly towards peace in these very difficult times through embracing justice and negotiating in good faith for the good of the people.

*(Pause)* Lord hear us OR We pray to the Lord.

We pray for all those preparing to return to learning and teaching. May they be renewed by their rest and find themselves inspired to be the best they can be.

*(Pause)* Lord hear us OR We pray to the Lord.

We pray for all those who support educators. May they be rewarded for their faithful service by the results of the education process and the fulfillment of each person's potential.

*(Pause)* Lord hear us OR We pray to the Lord.

We pray for those who suffer through illness, war or deprivation. May their lives be transformed by prophets among them who work for justice and peace.

*(Pause)* Lord hear us OR We pray to the Lord.

We pray for those who have died and those who mourn. May eternal peace be given to those who have died and peace in the grief journey for those who mourn them.

*(Pause)* Lord hear us OR We pray to the Lord.

## Conclusion

Loving God, you are the fount of all goodness and mercy. Hear our prayer through the power of the Holy Spirit and in the name of Jesus, the Christ.

**Amen.**

## Music selections by Alessio Loiacono and Chris deSilva

Title	AOV1	AOV2	AOVK	CWB	CWBII	GA
All the ends of the earth	76					420
Blessed Jesus, at your word				626	457	531
City of God	57				453	498
God has chosen me					495	
Jesus Christ is waiting						507
Lord to whom shall we go?	6					189
My soul in stillness waits					237	280
O Christ, the healer, we have come				759	127	
O God you search me		31			572	
O God, your people gather					574	
Praise the Lord, you heav'ns adore him				790	583	409
Praise the one who breaks the darkness					584	
Praise to the Lord		132		792	586	
Praise to you, O Christ, our saviour	28				587	407
Sing a new song	80				598	414
Sing a new song to the Lord		76			600	
The beatitudes				817	456	489
The light of Christ	186			826		405
To live like Jesus			160			
We remember	81					446
Your hands, O Lord, in days of old					129	

Title	S&S2
If today	268
If today you hear his voice	269

## Psalms Selected by Chris deSilva and Angela McCarthy

Psalm 94: *If today you hear his voice, harden not your hearts.*

	CWB	JOBB	LPB	PM	PM rev
Psalm 94	334	pg. 52	pg. 95	pg. 68	72

## Music selections by Michael Mangan

If today you hear his voice (LCC) *Ps 94/95 (Chn's Lectionary [Psalm, Gifts]*

Heaven shall be yours (TCS) *Beatitudes [Communion]*